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ABSTRACT

This paper describes both the requirements and implications of a new law regulating teacher certification and recertification in Maine. Five statements are presented which accompany the legislation and concisely describe the rationale and intent of those who developed it. A sixth statement proposes the development of support systems by local school units, providing for local support teams to improve the teaching effectiveness of all teachers with special emphasis on the beginning teacher. This paper focuses on this sixth statement, and discusses who will be on the local staff support system and what the support system is expected to do at the local level. This analysis of the role of the staff support system identifies 15 actual and inferred responsibilities. Among other responsibilities, it is pointed out that the intent of the legislature was to promote and authorize local determination of who should be issued a master teacher certificate. The implications of this element of the legislation are discussed. A model is presented of the functions and organization of a staff support system in a typical school district. (JD)

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MAINE'S NEW TEACHER CERTIFICATION LAW:

IMPETUS FOR LOCAL IN-SERVICE INITIATIVE

A PAPER PRESENTED

BY

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MAINE'S NEW TEACHER CERTIFICATION LAW:

IMPETUS FOR LOCAL IN-SERVICE INITIATIVE

The purpose of this presentation is to describe briefly both the requirements and implications of Legislative Document 2434 - the new law regulating teacher certification and recertification in Maine.

Enacted in April of 1984, and intended for implementation July 1, 1988, L.D. 2434 is a result of a three year study by the State Board of Education. The following statement accompanies the legislation and concisely describes the rationale and intent of those who developed it.

"STATEMENT OF FACT"

1. All teachers will have a strong liberal arts and science background with a major field of study in the subject area to be taught.

2. A provisional certificate is the initial certificate issued to beginning teachers for a 2-year period. The teacher, working with a locally-designed support system, will attain a high level of effectiveness, resulting in a professional certificate. The provisional certificate is renewable under special conditions.

3. A professional certificate will be issued to the beginning teacher demonstrating high level competencies to a local support team during the initial 2-year teaching period. The professional certificate will be issued for 5 years and is renewable.

4. A master teacher certificate will be attainable for a teacher who holds professional certification and has demonstrated exemplary professional skills in classroom teaching or in such other areas as supervising student teachers, curriculum and staff development or in-service training, as determined by the local school unit.

5. Pilot projects designed to identify procedures for training and certifying master teachers will be developed in consultation with local administrative units and will be in effect from 1984 to 1987. A report on the results of the projects, with recommendations for funding, will be ready for the 112th Legislature. Although this bill does not require all districts to have master teachers, such a career opportunity for teachers is strongly encouraged.

6. Support systems are to be planned and developed by local school units. The support system plan provides for local support teams to improve the teaching effectiveness of all teachers with special emphasis on the beginning teacher. These support teams will be composed of a majority of teachers and other professional personnel to assist and develop teaching techniques and competencies. Local units are encouraged to make every effort to develop partnerships with intitutions of higher education, the Department of Educational and Cultural Services and other community resources. (L.D. 2434, 1984)

The section of the legislation most germane to this conference is that regarding the local staff support system and its duties and responsibilities. It is my intention, therefore, to focus the discussion this hour on that section, hoping to answer the questions, "Who is on the staff support system?" and "What is it expected to do at the local level?"

According to the legislation, an approved support system must contain the following:

1. a majority of classroom teachers

2. a description of the duties and responsibilities of the support system in the preparation of a teacher action plan for both provisional teachers and applicants for master teacher certification.

3. a description of any current or planned linkages the support system has or will have with institutions of higher education, department of education personnel and members of the public in the operation of its support system.

It is also interesting to note that no district may employ a provisional level teacher unless that district has a state approved locally designed staff support system which adheres to the performance criteria listed above.

STAFF SUPPORT SYSTEM:

IDENTIFIED TASKS

Analysis of the role of the staff support system identifies fifteen discrete actual and inferred responsibilities.

TRANSPARENCY OF TASKS OF SUPPORT SYSTEM
(Transparency #1 attached)

An itemized list follows.

1. Recommend to the local school district superintendent of schools and the state commissioner of education, those persons who should receive professional teacher certification.

Professional certification is attained after a two year probationary period during which the candidate for professional teacher status follows a planned set of professional growth activities developed and monitored by a local staff support system.

2. Recommend a person be granted a master teacher certificate.

A comparison of the first two duties of the local staff support system identifies an interesting contrast. Nowhere in the legislation, other than in item one above, is the staff support system directed to recommend certification to the local superintendent. It can be inferred that recommendation for Master Teacher Certification by-passes the local administration and school board, and proceeds directly to the state level. Time will tell.

3. Provides support for developing good teaching and class management skills to those with provisional certificates.

4. Provides assistance and review to all individuals who are candidates for a higher level certificate.

5. Assists all teachers in becoming better teachers.

6. Develops a Teacher Action Plan in consultation with the teacher who is the subject of the plan. The plan shall:

   A. Describe the specific skills which must be developed and improved by teacher.

   B. Describe any other requirements which may include additional professional graduate and advanced study.

C. Contain the basis for a future decision positive or negative as to whether a teacher should be granted a professional teacher certificate or a master teacher certificate as applicable.

7. Keep records confidential.

(This may seem incidential, but poses some potential legal problems concerning who has a right to inspect an individual's employment records. While the recertification procedure is explicitly exempted from having any role in the renewal or termination of an employee's contract, a person must be certified to be employed as a teacher. Should the staff support system determine a person's teaching credential not be renewed, thereby effectively denying employment to that person, the probability of litigation appears high.)

8. Recommend to the commissioner an extension of a provisional contract for not more than two years. This recommendation would include a Teacher Action Plan describing the goals to be met by the teacher to achieve a professional certificate, specific steps needed to achieve those goals, and criteria for measuring whether those goals have been successfully completed.

9. Interpreted from the legislation (section 13016, pgs. 8-9).

Be prepared to defend its recommendation to renew or not renew a probationary certificate at a commissioners' fact finding panel,

if that recommendation is in conflict with the recommendation of the local school district superintendent.

10. Recommend recertification for those persons holding professional certification.

11. Recommend recertification for those persons holding master teacher certification.

12. Interpretation (section 13016, pg. 9) not recommend recertification of a person holding a professional certificate.

13. Interpretation (section 13016, pg. 9) not recommend recertification at a master teacher level a person holding a master teacher certificate.

14. Recommend recertification at a professional certificate level for those persons holding a master teacher certificate who either choose not to seek its renewal, or fail to maintain master teacher skills.

A. Determine if a person holding a master teacher certificate has maintained those skills necessary to retain a master teacher certificate.

B. Interpretation - determine if a person holding a master teacher certificate, it not being renewed, meets the requirements for a professional teacher certificate.

To be qualified for a master teacher certificate, an applicant must minimally meet the following criteria:

A. Possess a professional teacher certificate;

B. Demonstrate exemplary professional skills in classroom instruction and may have additionally contributed to the profession in such areas as:

1. Curriculum development;

2. Teacher in-service training and effective staff development; or

3. Student teacher supervision; and

C. Has obtained the support system's positive recommendation based on the contents of a teacher action plan pursuant to section 13015. (section 13014, pgs. 5-6).

The above regulations excerpted almost directly from L.D. 2434, clearly demonstate the intent of the legislature to promote and authorize local determination of who should be issued a master teacher certificate. It is incumbent upon each staff support system to develop objective criteria for master teacher certification, and, through the use of teacher action plans, to accurately monitor the progress of master teacher candidates.

A question arises as to whether a person designated as a master teacher by a staff support system in district X, would be recognized as meeting the criteria for master teacher in district Y. Is it reasonable to expect that locally determined criteria would have some generic consistency statewide, but equally reasonable that local specifics would preclude unrestricted transfers of master teachers from district to district? Simply stated, if I had a five year master teacher credential earned while working in one district, and

and I was hired to teach in another district, would the new employer be required to recognize the master teacher credential? At this time, no determination has been made. Hopefully these problems will be worked out prior to implementation of the law.

15. Recommend that a teacher who is transferring credentials from another state to work in Maine, and who otherwise meets the regulations, be awarded a professional teacher certificate.

In summary, local school districts are being required to initiate, monitor and evaluate the professional growth of teachers. The model for doing this is a committee or committees whose majority membership is classroom teachers.

Much of the recent writing on education has urged that teachers be given a greater voice in their own professional behavior. This law demands that voice be heard. In effect, it mandates professional behavior. It also raises many questions which will need answering if the noble intentions of the legislation are to be realized. For example, what are the implications of a group, with a membership majority of peers, determining the certification status of local colleagues; or how will distinction be made in this model between a professional teacher and a master teacher; and will this model improve instruction?

The questions just raised cannot yet be answered. Fortunately the law does not go into effect until 1988. Accompanying the legislation was money to fund pilot programs and evaluations. Pilot sites are being determined at the present time. University faculty have submitted an evaluation proposal to the state board of education. If accepted, the proposal would involve frequent on-site visits by objective evaluators.

Once pilot schools and districts have been selected, staff support systems need to be created. Persons selected to participate as members of staff support

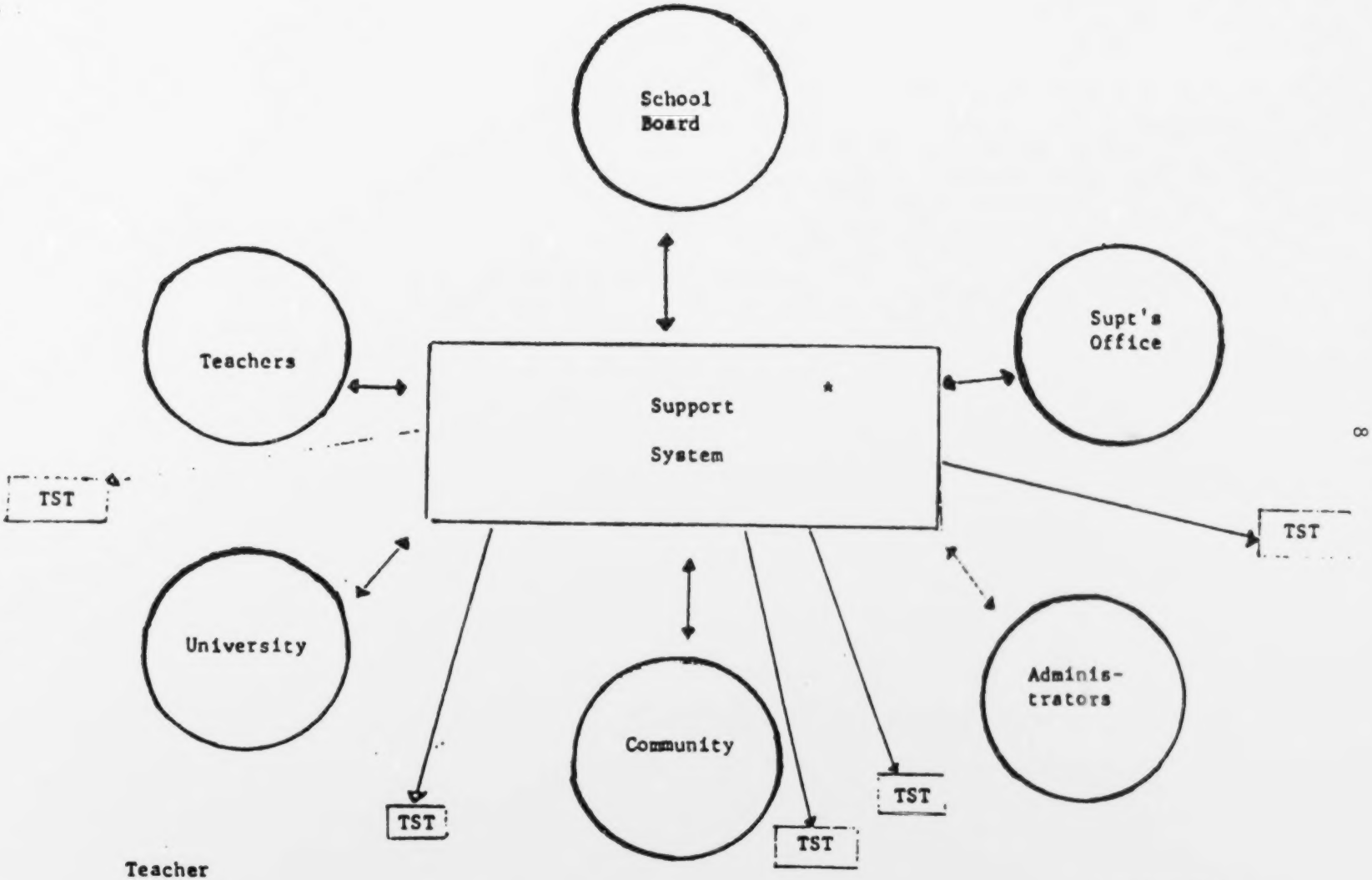
systems will need to have or develop certain professional skills in order to assist their colleagues. Among the skills needed will be the ability to aid in the creation of Teacher Action Plans, observation and supervisory skills, group dynamics and behavior skills, and organizational skills. Some districts already have staff development committees, but not many. Therefore staff support systems will need to effectuate operational models which address such questions as "Will the entire support system create and evaluate each teacher's action plan?"

SUPPORT SYSTEM MODEL
(Transparency #2)

The attached figure represents a staff support system. While a majority of members are teachers, other school district employees and community members are included, as well as university personnel. In this model, members are elected by their various constituencies and serve for a period of three years. Service terms should be rotated to guarantee that experienced persons will always be part of the group.

The major function of the staff support system will be to help the professional growth of teachers. In this model, each teacher who needs a Teacher Action Plan will be informed of the criteria for a viable plan and assigned a committee member as a peer helper and conduit between the individual and the staff support system. Individuals will be assigned a teacher support team comprised of three persons. For example, an English teacher might have her department head, another English teacher and a history teacher. One of these persons should be on the staff support system large group. I don't see this as an absolute, but it is important that at least one of the three knows how to assist the teacher in the development of the teacher's professional

SUPPORT SYSTEM MODEL



Teacher Support Team

* Majority Membership from Classroom Teachers

growth plan. The members of this sub-group working with the individual, will develop the plan and submit it to the staff support system for approval. The larger group will either accept or reject the plan as proposed. If accepted, the plan will be used by the teacher and her three member team as one way of monitoring the teacher's progress as a professional. At the end of a pre-determined time, the three member support team will attest to the growth or lack of growth of the individual. They will submit their testimony to the full support system for approval. If an affirmative report of the team is accepted, the support system will then recommend the teacher be certified at the level toward which she had been working.

The model presented has worked in a nine-town rural school district. In that district, the staff support committee and a joint educational council, also with teachers as its membership majority, work together to recommend persons for recertification and advise the superintendent and school board on matters relating to instruction.

It is my opinion that locally developed staff support systems can work if the members are properly prepared to assist peers, and if the administration of the district works cooperatively with teachers toward improving education. Such opportunities if taken seriously can enhance teacher efficacy and feeling of accomplishment. All persons involved can benefit from such a system, if .....?

TRANSPARENCY #1A

LD 2434

Identified Tasks of a support system:

13013. Professional teacher certificate

1. Page 5, lines 4 and 5
Recommend to supt. and commissioner those persons who should receive professional teacher certificates.

13014. Master Teacher Certificate

2. Page 6, lines 1, 2, 3
Recommend a person be granted a master teacher certificate.

13015. Support System

3. Page 6, lines 27-36
Provide support for developing good teaching and class management skills to those with provisional certificates.

4. Provide assistance and review to all individuals who are candidates for a higher level certificate.

5. Assist all teachers in becoming better teachers.

6. Page 7, lines 32-41
Develop a teacher action plan in consultation with the teacher who is the subject of the plan. The plan shall:

A. Describe the specific skills which must be developed and improved by the teacher

B. Describe any other requirements which may include additional professional graduate and advanced study

C. Page 8, lines 1-3
Contain the basis for a future decision positive or negative as to whether a teacher should be granted a professional teacher certificate or a master teacher certificate as applicable.

7. Page 8, line 5
Keep records confidential

13016. Renewal of Teacher Certificates

8. Page 8, lines 29-35
Recommend to the commissioner an extension of a provisional certificate for not more than two years. This recommendation would include a Teacher Action Plan describing the goals to be met by the teacher to achieve a professional certificate, specific steps needed to achieve those goals, and criteria for measuring whether those steps have been successfully completed.

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9. Interpreted from 13016, pages 8 and 9, lines 8-27, 9, 1-8
Be prepared to defend at fact finding its recommendation either yes or no - if that recommendation is in conflict with that of the school superintendent.

10. Page 9, lines 14-18
Recommend recertification for those persons holding a professional teacher certificate.

11. Page 9, lines 30-33.

Recommend recertification for those persons holding a master teacher certificate.

12. Interpretation (13016, Page 9, lines 16-17)
Not recommend recertification of a person holding a professional certificate.

13. Interpretation (13016, Page 9, lines 30-32)
Not recommend recertification at master teacher level of a person holding a master teacher certificate.

14. Page 9, lines 33-38
Recommend recertification at a professional certificate level, those persons holding a master teacher certificate who either choose not to seek its renewal, or fail to maintain master teacher skills.

A. Determine if a person holding a master teacher certificate has maintained those skills necessary to continue to hold a master teacher certificate.

B. Interpretation determine if a person holding a master teacher certificate, if not being renewed, meets the requirements for a professional teacher certificate.

13017. Interstate Agreements

15. Page 10, lines 2-12
Notwithstanding any other requirements of this chapter, a teacher, who is eligible to hold a provisional teacher certificate pursuant to an interstate agreement authorized by Chapter 511, has at least 2 academic years of prior teacher experience outside the State and has taught for fewer than 2 years in Maine with a provisional teacher certificate, may be awarded a professional teacher certificate if recommended by the administrative unit's support system and is otherwise deemed to be eligible by the commissioner.